

## **What is the Incident Command System (ICS)?**

One of the benefits of NIMS is that it institutionalizes the use of the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS was developed in the 1970's as a result of the catastrophic wildfires in California. Researchers concluded that incident response failures were far more likely to result from inadequate management than from any other single reason.

ICS is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept based on management best practices. It can be used for both large and small incidents and it is built to expand or contract as needed. Key features include the use of common terminology, management of organizational resources, manageable span of control, use of position titles, reliance on an incident action plan, integrated communications and accountability.

In each incident, no matter the size, there is always one person in charge. That person is the Incident Commander. In simple terms, the role of the Incident Commander is to make decisions. The Incident Commander may have a Command Staff made up of a Public Information Officer, a Safety Officer and a Liaison Officer.

Finally, depending on the size of the incident, the Incident Commander may have a General Staff. There are four General Staff positions: Operations (Doers), Planning (Thinkers), Logistics (Getters) and Finance (Payers). Not all positions need to be filled for every incident and no one person should have more than seven people reporting to them.

While it started out as a tool used primarily by the fire services, ICS is now required to be used by all agencies and emergency responders. The reality is, however, that, while the terminology might be new, we have all used the various concepts at one time or another.

For more information on the Incident Command System, check out the ICS Resource Center at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/ICSResource/index.htm>.